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Mentorship in the Development of Future Health Professionals

Knowledgeable and engaging role models are critical to the success of any young person who dreams of becoming a health professional – especially for students who live in rural and urban underserved communities. Many students in Missouri do not have the benefit of convenient access to health care in their neighborhoods – much less a community full of doctors and other health professionals in their social networks. At the same time, it can be daunting for some health professions students to consider choosing a career in an underserved community without themselves receiving support in how to mentor younger generations and partner successfully within local communities.

AHEC programs across the country are structured with these challenges in mind. Leveraging the university-community partnerships inherent across all AHEC programs, Missouri AHEC supports all of their program participants in finding specific ways to mentor students earlier in the health careers pipeline.

At MU School of Medicine, medical students in the Bryant Scholars Rural Track Program provide mentoring to high school students through Mid-Missouri AHEC health careers exposure activities, as part of their 3rd year Community Integration Program. Rural Track students at MU also provide mentoring to undergraduate students interested in medicine through the summer Med Prep programs. Many Bryant Scholars started out as high school students supported by their local AHEC.

Medical students at ATSU Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine engage with local high school students in similar ways, including the option to spend an extra year of studies to become an anatomy or medical education fellow. This month in Northwest Missouri, one of the fellows helped at an AHEC event to deliver part of the Medical Explorations in Science and Anatomy (MESA) curriculum that they had spent the past year designing for high school students.

At Saint Louis University School of Medicine, medical students receive mentoring in how to build reciprocal partnerships within underserved communities through SLU AHEC in the Family and Community Medicine Department. As Doctors for Diversity Task Force members, medical and health professions students serve as mentors and tutors and share their insights on the path to health careers in East Central Missouri AHEC's high school Health Careers clubs.

"Growing up, I didn't have doctors around that I could look to as role models," says Apoorva Anandan, a SLU med student who mentors students through AHEC. "We hope they will succeed and come back to practice in their own community."



SLU medical students mentor students from ECMO AHEC Health Careers Club

MAHEC is a partnership of seven locally-governed organizations and three university-based health professions education programs working statewide to increase the number of Missouri youth entering stable, high-paying jobs as healthcare professionals and the number of professionals caring for underserved populations.

The MAHEC partners include:

- A.T. Still University – Kirksville
- University of Missouri – Columbia
- Saint Louis University
- Northeast Missouri AHEC – Kirksville
- Northwest Missouri AHEC – St. Joseph
- West Central Missouri AHEC – Lexington
- Mid-Missouri AHEC – Rolla
- East Central Missouri AHEC – St. Louis
- Southeastern Missouri AHEC – Poplar Bluff
- Southwest Missouri AHEC – Springfield

MAHEC: Connecting students to careers, professionals to communities, and communities to better health